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ABSTRACT

Academic administrators are in need of principles and conceptual frameworks for planning and evaluating responses to social issues. Hence, the major purpose of this paper is to outline a conceptual framework for academic planning and evaluation related to social issues. Following a review of the significance of the changes during the sixties, a conceptual framework is outlined. The framework is developed around a set of questions for the academic planner: (1) Does the proposed program have an intrinsic value, and if so, what is this value given the idea of higher education, the specific mission that exists at the given institution, and the fundamental nature of the social problem being addressed? (2) Does their exist sufficent administrative, faculty, and student understanding of the problem, commitment to the specific program idea, and is there a strong indication that such commitments will remain in tact? (3) Are there harmonious relations between the administration, students, and faculty with regard to the specific proposed program? (4) Are the necessary resources available for implementing the program? (5) Can the proposed program achieve a high degree of academic quality and social consequences? The above questions are offered as a basis for decisionmaking in higher education. (Author/PG)

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A Conceptual Framework for Academic Responses to Social Issues

Prepared for Speech Communication Association

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by

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Introduction

Academic administrators are in need of principles and conceptual frameworks for planning and evaluating responses to social issues. Hence, the major purpose of this paper is to outline a conceptual framework for academic planning and evaluation related to social issues. Following a review of the significance of the changes during the sixties, a conceptual framework will be outlined.

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The Significance of the Sixties

During the sixties, many academic activists held that "the" problems were of such significance that any and all means necessary were legitimate for achieving what was deemed "social justice." The Vietnam War, racism, capitalism, poverty, misuse of natural resources, and inadequate student and faculty participation in campus governance were among the many problems to which responses were "demanded" from colleges and universities.[1] More specifically, colleges and universities were charged with:

1. contributing to the general oppression of people--particularly citizens of color,
2. contributing to the "unjust" Vietnam War by conducting war related research and ROTC programs,
3. reinforcing and being sources of racism, sexism, imperialism, and elitism,
4. perpetuating "irrelevance" because of the
   a. insufficient amount of undergraduate career preparation,
   b. lack of ethnic studies in general, and Black, Chicano, American Indian, and Asian Studies in particular,
   c. over reliance on the lecture mode of instruction,
   d. absence of women, environmental, conflict, peace, love, and urban studies,
   e. relative absence of field work and other applied learning experiences: and,
5. maintaining unnecessary and improper rules and regulations concerning degree requirements such as foreign languages, English Composition, and other so-called distribution requirements.

Many institutions responded to the pressures of the sixties by doing the following types of things:

1. denied academic credit for ROTC or removed ROTC programs,
2. dropped English Composition, foreign languages, and other specific degree requirements,
3. failed to accept new contracts for secret, government sponsored research, and phased out war related research,

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4. placed greater control on giving student information to persons external to the university,

5. sold stocks in companies located in South Africa or in companies which produced war related materials,

6. developed faculty, staff, and minority student recruitment programs,

7. instituted Black, Chicano, American Indian, Asian, Ethnic, Jewish, women, urban, environmental, and conflict studies,

8. introduced Alternative Curricula, Freshman Studies, Credit for Life and Work Experience, Pass-Fail grading and External Degree Programs, and,

9. renewed emphasis on teaching.

Under banners such as "relevance," "flexibility," "self-discovery," and "social commitment," institutions of higher education responded with a plethora of courses, programs, centers, and institutes on subjects such as war, peace, ethnicity, drugs, poverty, racism, violence, counterculture, and whatever else that was considered to be a major social problem. Academic institutions also made significant decreases in degree requirements, and they increased student and junior faculty participation in campus governance.

While all of the above academic changes addressed important problems, it should be noted that these changes constituted a significant assault on the existing definitions of the goals, purposes, nature, and processes of higher education. Yet, while the very souls of colleges and universities were at stake, seldom were there sufficient dialogues on the roles and purposes of the specific institutions and the programs within the institutions. There was even less discussion of the roles and purposes of higher education in general.

Colleges and universities made change after change primarily on the basis of the general nature, seriousness, and urgency of the particular

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problem being addressed. In making academic changes, all too often the nature and immediacy of the felt difficulty far overshadowed discussion of the nature of higher education and the mission of the given institution. Each successive dropping of old requirements, failing to institute new guidelines when old requirements were dropped, and instituting of new programs contained yet to be determined implications for the nature and quality of education at the various institutions. Many institutions got caught in a strong current of social justice eclecticism with each new institutional response drawing them further away from consciously agreed on reasons for being.

It is not assumed here that institutions got drawn away from reasons for being all of which were necessarily "good." Nor is it held that the responses to social issues constituted all of the significant academic changes during the sixties. To be sure, American higher education had been adrift for some time, and the responses to the issues of the sixties are not the primary culprits for higher education being so far off course.[2] What is being said here is that the rapid rate of changes and the nature of the changes during the sixties did increase the drift away from institutional programs being based on a common general mission.

The rate of academic change during the sixties is of special importance because institutions were challenged to do more, better, and new things at precisely the point when higher education was ending its greatest period of expansion and entering a depressed financial period.[3] Demands for change came at the same time that student enrollments were decreasing, federal funds were decreasing, and many traditional programs were fighting for survival. Thus, while many of the new programs gained "approval," such approval often did not carry with it sufficient resource commitments.

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Several additional important characteristics stand out in terms of many of the sixties' changes. First, it should be remembered that many of the changes were prefaced by extreme forms of protest. Thus, the extreme protest often served to alienate many senior faculty members, administrators, citizens, and government officials who subsequently placed new expectations on higher education.[4]

The perceived importance and urgency of the problems led to the establishment of programs without sufficient planning. Overnight, demands were acknowledged, new programs were established, and acting heads were appointed who often found themselves involved in protracted adversary relations with members of the administration and tenured faculty. Many of the new programs were based on premises that were contradictory to established academic practices. For example, while the institutions were discipline based, many of the new programs such as Women, Black, and Urban Studies were interdisciplinary in nature. Thus, new programs had to struggle with their own internal developmental problems as well as external pressures from "normal university procedures."

It should also be noted that much of the activity of the sixties was addressed to abolishing rules, requirements, and programs. While there was often academic and social justification for such actions, all too often nothing took the place of that which was abolished. Thus, course requirements were abolished, and, without sufficient guidance, many undergraduates floundered in making course selections. New grading systems were introduced, and it remained for graduates of the seventies to experience not being admitted to graduate schools because of non-traditional grades such as Pass and Satisfactory.

With the various new programs came many kinds of new students.[5] Traditional faculty members suddenly found themselves confronted with

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students who had learning skills, interests, motivations, career aspirations, and cultural backgrounds other than those which students generally possessed prior to the sixties. Yet, more and more new students came without the traditional faculty being trained to deal with them. Similarly, affirmative action programs brought forth new faculty members and administrators who were significantly different from the existing faculty members and administrators.

The new faculty members engaged in new kinds of courses, programs, research and community service, placed different emphasis on teaching, research, and community service, and, yet significant modifications were not made in terms of making the faculty reward systems accommodate the new faculty members' interests. Thus, a situation developed whereby there was an attempt to funnel highly diversified faculty members through, for the most part, a set of expectations that existed for a more homogeneous faculty. In addition to the discrepancies between many new faculty members' interests and the existing faculty reward systems, the presence of the new faculty members presented complex new social-psychological situations. For example, the presence of the new faculty members led to many traditional faculty members becoming conscious of their own sexism and racism. Few faculty meetings have been the same since the hiring of the new faculty members.

For various reasons, those involved in academia now find it necessary to "take a hard look" at the changes of the sixties as well as many of the traditional programs. Stimulated by the current financial plight of higher education and an increased realization of what is specifically meant by a "commitment to social justice," many see the need for establishing priorities and a rationale for such priorities. In order to help

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insure that coming decisions are not simply reactionary, political, or budget driven in nature, a major challenge of the seventies entails determining the appropriate ways for colleges and universities to constructively participate in resolving social problems while retaining their integrity as institutions of higher education.

It is assumed here that colleges and universities should respond to social problems such as those which were addressed in the sixties. However, the responses of the sixties must be significantly improved lest we run the possibility of destroying the essential nature of higher education and/or the possibility of many of the innovations of the sixties being phased out of existence. In an unpublished paper, I observed that:

> "Structured-liberal" is now ascending the throne that was occupied only yesterday by "flexibility." "Career possibilities" now controls much of what was recently under the influence of "self-discovery." "Classics" now reign in many places where "relevance" could formerly be heard. It is becoming common to hear ethnic minorities and others criticize many of the ethnic and urban programs of the 1960's. In less than five years, many of those things which were hailed as progressive, revolutionary, liberal, innovative, flexible, and relevant are now dying like Autumn leaves. Alas, for some, "streaking" has replaced "striking." Indeed, this is a critical time for those who are concerned with affecting changes in higher education.[6]

In order to avoid such rapid swinging of the pendulum, a major operative assumption in the following discussion is that academicians must first clarify the nature, purposes, and processes of higher education in the latter half of the twentieth century, and then socially responsive academic planning and evaluation must proceed from the context of the given institutional understanding of the nature, purposes, and processes of higher education.

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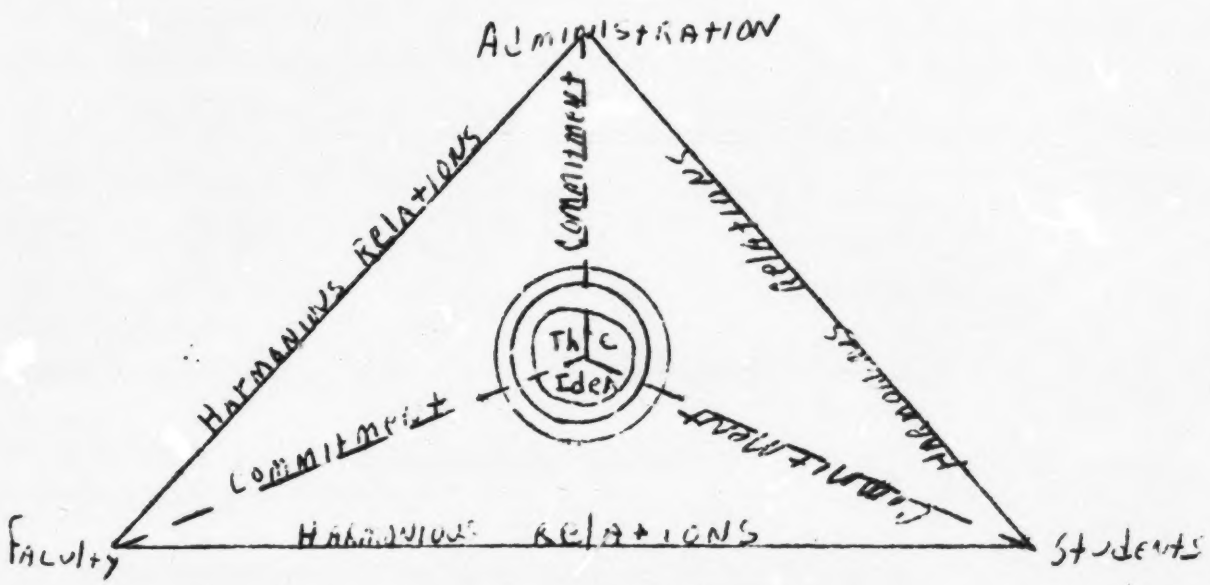
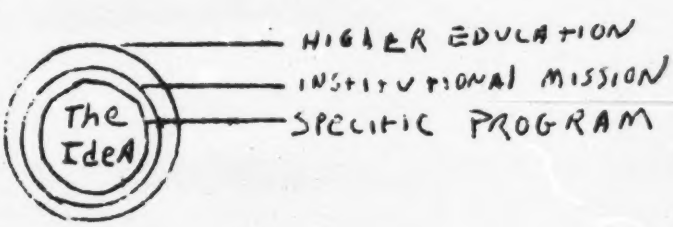
General Considerations Related to a Conceptual Framework for Responding to Social Issues

Those who are responsible for academic program planning have the responsibility of insuring that the situation diagrammed below is met.* The fulfillment of the situation diagrammed below begins with the articulation of the Idea. Once the Idea is articulated, one goes about securing Commitments to the Idea, and Harmonious Relations between those who are committed to the Idea.





*The essence of the above diagram was formulated by Professor Fela Sowande of the University of Pittsburgh.

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The formulation of the Idea in the preceding diagram takes place as follows. First it is necessary to articulate the nature, purposes, and processes of higher education. This general articulation concerning higher education serves as the context for all further academic planning and evaluation. Given the articulation of the nature, purposes, and processes of higher education, it is necessary to define the given institution's specific mission. The institution's specific mission then serves as a smaller context for specific program planning. The specific program constitutes the concretization of the Idea, and the nature, purposes, and processes of higher education serve as the philosophical parameters of the Idea. The specific institutional mission serves as guidelines for movements between the concrete programs and the philosophical parameters of the Idea.

While the outcome of activities related to the conduct of the Idea must ultimately achieve social significance, the natures of social concerns should not assume primacy in academic planning and evaluation, i.e., the natures of the social concerns should not serve as the parameters for academic planning and evaluation. Instead, alterations in the nature of social problems should serve as indices for evaluating the extent to which the basic Idea is legitimate, and/or the extent to which there is consistency between the philosophical principles and actual practices. When the nature of a specific social issue comes to dominate the central thinking of academicians, the way is paved for institutions of higher education to become social service institutions, and, subsequently, institutions for supporting the political ideology of those in power.

Given the importance of the Idea, the question arises as to who should articulate the Idea. While students, administrators, trustees, alumnae, members of government, private donors, and citizens should contribute to

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the articulation of the Idea, the ultimate responsibility for articulating the Idea resides with the Faculty. The Faculty constitutes those persons who have been specifically prepared to articulate and carry out the Idea. A major challenge of the seventies entails restoring the Faculty to its role in articulating the Idea, and simultaneously, determining the appropriate ways for all other essential persons to participate in the articulation of the Idea. Necessarily, then, serious consideration must be given to who constitutes a member of the Faculty. Certainly, the mere collection of a given number of Ph.D. holders under one roof does not constitute a Faculty. Nor can the Faculty be defined simply on the basis of who happens to be currently employed.

As institutions have taken on more and more diverse objectives, there has been a great need to hire "faculty" members who do not have "traditional" credentials not because of their innate inability to obtain such credentials but because they do not have all of the "traditional" interests. In doing so, serious questions were raised with regards to much of what "traditional" things faculty members do. Specific attention has been called to the roles of teaching, university service, and community service in faculty hiring, promotion, and tenure decisions. While acknowledging the role of discipline based research for furthering the objectives of traditional departments, new faculty members have raised serious questions concerning the role of interdisciplinary as opposed to disciplinary research. In short, there exist very serious questions concerning the nature of Faculty members.

Given the role of the Faculty in articulating the Idea, there can be no more important university or departmental committee than a committee with a detailed charge to study and make recommendations concerning the

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nature and functions of those who are to make up the Faculty of a given institution or department. Until such a committee has reported and the nature and functions of the Faculty have been affirmed, no major academic planning and evaluation can take place since it is the Faculty that has the primary responsibility for such planning and evaluation.

As important as the Faculty is to the conduct of academic affairs, the affairs of the institution can only be conducted when there is also administrative and student Commitment to the Idea as well as Harmonious Relations between the Administration, Faculty, and Students. In order to obtain commitments and harmonious relations, all parties must have a clear understanding of the Idea. The intrinsic merits of the Idea and the consequences of implementing the Idea must be understood by all parties. Yet the necessary dialogue cannot take place so long as traditional Administrators, Students and Faculty members, and new students, faculty members, and administrators are ignorant of each others' cultural heritages, socio-economic backgrounds, skills, interests, and aspirations. Nothing, then, is more necessary at this time than Administrative, Faculty and Student dialogue on the basic principles of the Idea.

While there is no formula for obtaining harmonious relations, certain actions are clearly not conducive to establishing harmonious relations. In general, colleges and universities must do all that is possible to avoid the growing "we-they" adversary relations within and between Students, Faculty members, and Administrators. Similarly, harmonious relations do not ensue from rigid rules. Harmonious human behavior requires flexibility. Hence, agreed upon principles are needed and not rigid rules. It has been said that, "the last act of a dying organization is to get out a new and enlarged copy of the rule book."[7] Instead of an enlarged copy of the

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student handbook, we are in great need of situations such as freshman seminars where specific aspects of the nature, purposes, and processes of higher education are explored, and a certain degree of integration takes place between students' aspirations and institutions' capabilities.

The main thrust of the above discussion is that socially responsive academic planning and evaluation must flow from academic considerations as opposed to the nature of social, political, and economic issues impacting the given institutions. Figuratively speaking, academic considerations constitute the source of the river, and social, political, and economic issues produce major contours in the river.

One final assumption must be stated before the presentation is made of a specific conceptual framework for academic planning and evaluation is outlined. Specifically, while the need for intricate academic management systems is acknowledged, it is held that we must guard against the substitution of systems for judgements. Just as the specific methods used by scientists are secondary to the questions scientists ask, academic management systems should play a secondary role to questions concerning what ought to be the nature of higher education and why.

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A Set of Questions for Academic Planning and Evaluation Related to Social Issues

In discussing the distinguishing features of a philosophy, Susanne K. Langer wrote:

> ....Therefore a philosophy is characterized more by the formulation of its problems than by its solutions of them. Its answers establish an edifice of facts; but its questions make the frame in which its picture of facts is plotted. They make more than the frame; they give the angle of perspective, the palette, the style in which the picture is drawn--everything except the subject. In our questions lie our "principles of analysis," and our answers may express whatever those principles are able to yield.[8]

In keeping with the importance of questions as stated by Langer, the conceptual framework proposed here consists of a set of questions. The thrust of the following set of questions is that our formulations of the nature, purposes, and processes of higher education must constitute the "frame in which its picture of facts is plotted" and evaluated. The specific institutional mission refines the angle of perspective. Socially responsive programs should be the results of these ideas in action.

It was stated earlier that the Idea consists of philosophical, institutionally refined parameters that permit the projection of specific academic programs. In a similar fashion, it is held that responses to social issues must be based on one's assessment of the fundamental, root contributions to specific social problems.

This conceptual framework then, is a call for a return to consciousness of academic purpose. This is not a call for consciousness of the academic purposes that existed prior to the sixties. This is a call for a statement of academic purposes that reflects the best of the past, and the best of what old and new students, faculty members, administrators,

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and non-university persons can articulate about academic purposes for the last half of the twentieth century.

A set of questions which can be used for academicians formulating responses to social issues are as follows:

1. Does the proposed program have, and if so, what is the intrinsic value of the program given the idea of higher education, the specific mission that exists at the given institution, and the fundamental nature of the social problem being addressed?

2. Does there exist sufficient Administrative, Faculty, and Student understanding of the problem, commitment to the specific program idea, and is there a strong indication that such commitments will remain in tact?

3. Are there Harmonious Relations between the Administration, Students, and Faculty with regards to the specific proposed program?

4. Are the necessary resources available for implementing the program? If not, are there reasons to believe that the necessary resources can be acquired at a rate that would be conducive to the orderly development of the program?

5. Can the proposed program achieve a high degree of academic quality and social consequences?9

A new program should be approved for implementation or for that matter, an old program should be continued only if positive answers can be given to all five questions.

At first glance, the requirement of positive answers to all of the above questions might appear to be quite stringent. However, it should be kept in mind that there are many great ideas, many significant problems, many different institutions, ever increasing restricted funds, the appearance of new problems at a rate greater than existing problems are resolved, and a need for new institutions. Thus, there must be a conceptual basis for decision making, and the above set of questions is offered as one such basis.

FOOTNOTES

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[1]Riesman, David and Stadtman, Verne A. Academic Transformation: Seventeen Institutions Under Pressure. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1972.

[2]Hodgkinson, Harold L., and Meeth, Richard L. Editors. Power and Authority. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1971.

[3]Cheit, Earl F. The New Depression in Higher Education. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1971.

[4]Berdahl, Robert O. Statewide Coordination of Higher Education. American Council on Education, 1971.

[5]Cross, K. Patricia. Beyond the Open Door. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1971.

[6]Daniel, Jack L., "The Stanford University Progress Fund: A Vehicle for Academic Innovation," May, 1974, p.1.

[7]Gardner, John. Self-Renewal: The Individual and the Innovative Society. New York: Harper and Row Publishers, Inc., 1964, p. 55.

[8] Langer, Susanne K., Philosophy in a New Key, Massachusettes, 1957 p.4.

[9]Some of these ideas were borrowed from William F. Miller's "Academic Administration: Reflections on University Management in a Period of Dynamic Equilibrium," Stanford University Publication, 1972, p.4.